

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A 30

WALL STREET JOURNAL
8 October 1984

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

The Spook Busters

The Central Intelligence Agency still don't get no respect. It was bashed by the American left for trying to stop the flow of Soviet arms into Nicaragua. It was bashed again by the same people for *not* preventing the embassy bombing in Beirut by another set of U.S. enemies.

In both cases the CIA had performed better than anyone has a right to expect after the abuse heaped upon it the past decade. Its nerve in mounting even a timid operation in Central America was commendable, given the political risks that soon made themselves evident. And, as we learned last week, the CIA did warn of the Beirut bombing, identified the culprits, but, tragically, was not sufficiently heeded.

Of course, we all know the CIA's problem. Its key role in implementing U.S. efforts to contain Soviet expansionism has for years made it the No. 1 target of the left at home and abroad. The most interesting thing about the Beirut flap was a sign or two that moderate Democrats are seeing less political profit in joining the far left in CIA-bashing.

This was evidenced in the hullabaloo raised by President Reagan's speech at Bowling Green University in Ohio just after the Beirut bombing. He said, in essence, that terrorist dangers are harder to spot because U.S. intelligence agencies lost a lot of their field agents when they were under heavy political attack in the 1970s. Human intelligence (called "Humint" in the spook trade) was downgraded in favor of electronic spying. It was decided that "spying is somehow dishonest and let's get rid of our intelligence agents—and we did that to a large extent," Mr. Reagan said.

These remarks were interpreted as a scapegoating attack on former President Carter, even though Mr. Carter wasn't mentioned. Sen. Daniel Moynihan of the Senate Intelligence Committee was enraged. Mr. Reagan called Mr. Carter and explained that he was talking about a long-running process, not something that happened only in the Carter administration.

That was a nice thing to do, since Mr. Carter's political career was destroyed in part because of inadequate intelligence about the true personality of the Ayatollah Khomeini (something a good field agent might have uncovered). And indeed, Mr. Carter was only partly, not totally, to blame.

The undermining of U.S. intelligence dates back to the Church committee hearings of the early 1970s. The panel—of which former Sen. Walter Mondale was a member, assisted by his current foreign-policy adviser David Aaron—was a politically motivated witch hunt that mainly revealed that the CIA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which conducts counterintelligence, had been doing what they were ordered to do by successive presidents. The investigations seriously eroded morale in the intelligence agencies and earned them the mistrust of existing and potential agents abroad, not to mention allied intelligence agencies. Some disclosures of sensitive intelligence information suggested to agents that they could easily be "burned."

President Carter codified many of the Church committee biases into law with an executive order to intelligence agencies that was long on don'ts but woefully short on what these agencies were expected to do. His CIA chief, Adm. Stansfield Turner, systematically slashed the agency's Humint operations.

It's true, as Mr. Carter has recently emphasized, that spending on intelligence was increased in 1979. But little of that money went to rebuild Humint. The additional funds were appropriated mainly for satellites to monitor Soviet compliance with SALT agreements. Although Mr. Carter's SALT II agreement was never ratified, those funds weren't wasted. The satellites have been a big help in discovering Soviet SALT violations.

Mr. Reagan's efforts to rebuild intelligence have had more support from Democrats than they themselves care to admit. Congress in 1982 passed a law making it a felony to willfully disclose the name of U.S. intelligence agents, thus giving some protection against the deliberate "burning" of agents that was then delighting American leftists. Even those congressmen who posture about Central America have so far been careful not to leave CIA-aided anti-communists totally out in the cold.

The agency still has a long climb to make before it can provide the kind of intelligence that has become so vital to U.S. security in this age when the country's enemies operate mostly underground, dealing in arms, drugs and terror. But as these enemies become more dangerous, the agency may start to get the kind of respect and support that it needs.